

GUIDE TO THE FORT ROSS STATE HISTORIC PARK PHOTOGRAPHIC COLLECTION

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Park History

Fort Ross State Historic Park contains 3,386 acres of natural, cultural, and historical resources. Located in Sonoma County, the park is bordered to the west by the Pacific Ocean, to the east by Seaview/Meyers Grade Road, and is bisected by the San Andreas Fault; it is roughly 11 miles northwest of the town of Jenner. The park is accessible by car via State Highway 1.

Prior to Russian settlement, the area comprising the modern-day park was inhabited for several thousand years by the Kashaya people, a band of Pomo Indians. Naming their village site *Metini*, the Kashaya lived in numerous mobile encampments and enjoyed easy access to coastal resources, such as abalone, mussels, fish, various sea plants, and ample sea-salt harvests. Further inland, the Kashaya subsisted on various plants, acorns, deer, and other small mammals. They excelled at basket-making and established a thriving trade network with Coast Miwok tribes. A federally recognized tribe, the Kashaya Band of Pomo Indians continues to reside in Sonoma County at Stewarts Point Rancheria.

Across the Pacific Ocean, Russian fur-hunters began venturing away from their native mainland in 1742. In 1784, merchant and seafarer, Grigory Shelikhov and a crew of *Promyshlenniki*, native Siberian contract workers, established a settlement on Kodiak Island in present-day Alaska. Fifteen years later, Tsar Paul I granted exclusive charter to the Russian-American Company under the leadership of Nikolai Rezanov. The company quickly established numerous commercial colonies throughout Alaska and even a few in the Hawaiian Islands. A decade later, the company's Chief Manager and first governor of Russian Alaska, Alexander Baranov, tasked Chief Administrator Ivan Kuskov and his crew of 40 Russians and 150 Alaskan Alutiiq natives with establishing a colony in California to expand fur-bearing mammal hunting operations to the south as well as to begin agricultural production (**Figure 1**). Desiring a location not yet colonized by other European powers, which at that time extended as far north in California as the city of San Francisco, Baranov and Kuskov chose a location along the present-day Sonoma coastline, roughly 80 miles north of the Spanish city. Honoring their native *Rossia*, they named the settlement Fortress Ross.



Figure 1. Drawing of *Promyshlenniki* and Aleutian hunters, n.d. Catalog # 090-4834.

In 1812, Kuskov, with 25 Russians and 80 native Alaskans, constructed several buildings and a stockade out of local redwood timber. Enlisting Kashaya labor, they built two cannon-fortified blockhouses in the northwest and southeast corners of the fortress, a two-story manager's house, clerks' quarters, artisans' workshops, and Russian Officials' barracks. By the mid-1820s, they constructed a Russian Orthodox Christian chapel and, in 1836, a house for the fort's last manager, Alexander Rotchev, which still stands today (**Figure 2**). While the fort housed officials and hosted the colony's economic activity, low-ranking employees, Kashaya and Alutiiq laborers, and people of mixed ancestry lived in surrounding villages beyond the stockade walls.



Figure 2. Drawing of Fort Ross, 1830. Catalog # 090-S3228.

In addition to serving as imperial Russia's southernmost American furring settlement, the fort was also intended to produce agricultural goods for the Alaskan outposts. Other industries at the fort included blacksmithing, tanning, brickmaking, barrel-making, and ship-building. Though highly industrious, the fort never earned profits. In 1841, the company sold the fort's holdings (not the land, as Spain and then Mexico retained its title) to John Sutter, whose employee, John Bidwell, transported the fort's hardware, building materials, and livestock from the Sonoma coast to Sutter's fort in New Helvetia (present-day Sacramento).

Beginning in 1843, successive owners managed the land containing and surrounding the former Russian settlement until George W. Call purchased 8,000 acres in 1873 (**Figure 3**). At Call Ranch, the Call family exported cordwood, railroad ties, fence posts, tanbark, apples, and dairy products. The ranch was operational until 1973, the same year that the Call family deeded the property to the State of California.



Figure 3. Call Ranch, ca. 1895. Catalog # 090-5119.

In 1903, the California Historic Landmarks Commission of the Native Sons of the Golden West purchased the Russian stockade area from Call. A few months prior to the devastating 1906 San Francisco earthquake, the California State Board of Control acquired the historic property, which soon included several destroyed buildings and the collapsed Russian Orthodox chapel (**Figures 4 and 5**). In addition to acquiring more surrounding acreage from William Randolph Hearst, in 1909 the State classified the fort a state historic monument; it later reclassified the unit a state historic park in 1963. By the mid-1920s, the State had reconstructed and restored (albeit incorrectly) virtually all of the historic stockade and its buildings and structures. Following a 1953 archaeological dig, the California Division of Beaches and Parks set about correcting its earlier errors and, by 1958, had properly reconstructed or restored the fort's buildings (**Figure 6**). However, these successes were short lived. In 1970, fires at the park completely destroyed the chapel, melted the historic bronze bell, and damaged the Rotchev House roof (**Figure 7**). Park staff and volunteers worked diligently to repair

the fire damage—recasting the bell from earlier etchings—and reopened the park in 1974. Having acquired surrounding acreage from Call family members at various intervals in different sized parcels, ranging from a quarter-acre to nearly 400 acres at a time, the State received its largest parcel, 2,157 acres, from Save the Redwoods League in 1990.



Figure 4. Blockade bastion with earthquake damage, ca. 1910. Catalog # 090-4534.



Figure 5. Collapsed chapel, 1906. Catalog # 090-4727.



Figure 6. Chapel reconstruction, 1955. Catalog # 090-5288.



Figure 7. Chapel fire, October 1970. Catalog # 090-S3156.

California State Parks, coordinating with the Fort Ross Conservancy, preserves and interprets a wealth of natural, cultural, and historical resources at Fort Ross State Historic Park. In addition to the stockade and the buildings and structures contained therein—collectively designated a California Historical Landmark, a National Historic Landmark, and listed on the National Register of Historic Places—the park also includes other historic features, the Ruoff cemetery and Russian Orchard as well as the historic Call ranch house (**Figures 8-11**). Also included are miles of trails, numerous campsites and picnic areas, and fishing and diving zones, including a 90-acre underwater park containing Fort Ross Cove, site of the 1908 S. S. Pomona shipwreck. The park hosts numerous events throughout the year and is open daily from sunrise to sunset.



Figure 8. Chapel, cannons, and stockade, December 5, 2007. Catalog # 090-P56205.



Figure 9. Southeast blockhouse bastion, December 5, 2007. Catalog # 090-P56209.



Figure 10. Kuskov House, December 5, 2007. Catalog # 090-P56206.



Figure 11. Ruoff Cemetery, December 4, 2007. Catalog # 090-P56202.

Scope and Content

The Fort Ross State Historic Park Photographic Collection spans the years circa 1764-2015, with the bulk of the collection covering the years 1885-1925, 1948-1991, and 2007-2012. There is a total of 1,860 cataloged images including 1,129 photographic prints, scans, and negatives, 555 35mm slides, and 176 born-digital images. Photographs originated primarily from California State Parks staff as well as numerous privately donated collections.

The collection mainly depicts the various historic Russian-era buildings and structures found throughout the fort. Historic and contemporary views of the built environment include the Russian Orthodox Christian chapel; the northwestern and

southeastern blockhouse bastions; the Commandant's House, also known as the Rotchev House, the only original building standing in the park; the Kuskov House; the Officials' Barracks; the warehouse; the sally ports; the water well; cannons; the stockade walls; and the historical marker conferring historical landmark status. Images of the historic properties feature both pre- and post-restoration and -reconstruction views at various times throughout the twentieth century, including: 1906, when the major San Francisco earthquake wrought major damage to the chapel, the blockhouses, the stockade walls, and the sally port gates; the 1920s and 1950s, when staff and volunteers first restored and reconstructed the park's buildings and structures and later corrected earlier reconstruction errors; the early 1970s, when fires burned the chapel to the ground and damaged the Rotchev House roof, at least one blockhouse, and at least two stockade walls; and the years between 1970 and 1974, when staff and volunteers repaired, restored, and reconstructed buildings and structures that had suffered fire damage. Contemporary images also depict numerous buildings' interiors with attendant period furnishings, such as: the Kuskov House, including its armory, grain room, trade room, science room, tool room, storeroom, living quarters, and dining room; the Officers' Barracks/Quarters, including its sleeping quarters, coopers shop, dining room, and bedrooms; the chapel, including its cupola; both blockhouses, including their first and second floors; and the Rotchev House/Commandant's House, including its entry room, dining room, bedrooms, study, and living room.

The collection also includes numerous views of the fort in its entirety. These include panoramic, landscape, and aerial views. In addition to capturing the whole fort, they also depict the neighboring Ruoff Cemetery, the Russian Orchard, the rocky Sonoma coastline, and the Pacific Ocean.

Also depicted in the collection are other features of the seaside park. Images document: the interior and exterior of the Visitor Center, including its rustic external facade and its internal museum exhibits, interpretive displays, and bookstore; other areas of the park, such as Ruoff Cemetery, Russian Orchard, the historic Call ranch house, the parking lot, picnic areas, and campsites; and park signage.

The collection also documents numerous events at the fort. Such events include: the 1908 S. S. Pomona shipwreck off the Sonoma coast near Fort Ross Cove; restoration and reconstruction work performed in the 1920s, 1950s, and 1970s; the 1932 dedication ceremony, presided over by the Russian Orthodox Archbishop and other attendant clergy; the fort's 150th anniversary ceremony, held in 1962, featuring various California state officials and Russian Orthodox clergymen; the 1970 fire that burned the chapel down; the rededication ceremony held in 1974 after fire-damaged buildings had been restored or reconstructed; an archaeological project staged in the 1970s; and living history programs, also referred to as "environmental living programs," which feature historic reenactors in period garb leading groups in interpretive activities, facilitated between 1980 and 1990 and in 2012.

The collection also includes several miscellaneous items. Items include: early-nineteenth-century Russian drawings, portraits, paintings, and maps relating to Fort Ross, Russian and Aleut hunters, Russian-American Company officials, Russian Orthodox Christian icons, and other aspects of Russian history and culture. The

collection also features numerous artifacts unearthed during various archaeological digs.

Additionally, the collection features numerous historic photographs donated by Mercedes Stafford, descendant of George W. Call. These images date circa 1870 to 1900 and document the historic Call ranching operations, members of the Call family, Fort Ross during this time, and the surrounding landscape.

Related Collections

Benitz Family Letters, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Call Family Papers, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

E. O. Essig Papers Concerning Fort Ross, California, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Fort Ross and Timber Cove Views, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Fort Ross Map and Related Materials, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Fort Ross State Historic Park Collection, California State Parks Archives.

Materials Relating to Fort Ross, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Nicholas John Rokitiensky Collection, Stanford University: Hoover Institution.

View of Fort Ross, California, UC Berkeley: Bancroft Library.

Catalog Subject Search Terms

150 th anniversary	Ceremony
Aerial view	Chapel
Alexander Andreyevich Baranov	Coastline
Alexander Rotchev	Commandant's House
Archaeology project	Cupola
Armory	Dedication
Artifact(s)	Drawing
Barracks	Environmental Living Program
Bastion	Excavation
Bell	Exterior
Blockhouse	Fire
Call family	Fire damage
Call House	Fort Ross
Call Ranch	Fort Ross Cove
Cannon	Fort Ross Hotel

Fort Ross Landing
Foundation
George Washington Call
Governor's House
Grain room
Grinding wheel
Icon(s)
Ivan Kuskov
Interior
Kuskov House
Landscape view
Lectern
Living History Program
Map
Mercedes Call
Metal shop
Millstone
Monument
Nikolai Rezanov
Northeast bastion
North Cove
Office
Officers' Quarters
Officials' Barracks
Oscar Call
Pacific Ocean
Painting
Palisade
Panorama view
Pantry
Plaque
Portrait
Promyshlenniki
Reconstruction
Restoration
Rosa Call Pierce
Rotchev House
Ruins
Ruoff Cemetery
Russian cross
Russian Orchard
Russian Orthodox Christian
Sally port
Samovar

Sign(s)
Soldiers' Barracks
Southwest bastion
Stockade wall(s)
Timber Cove
Trade room
Visitor Center
Voznesenski
West bastion
Windmill